

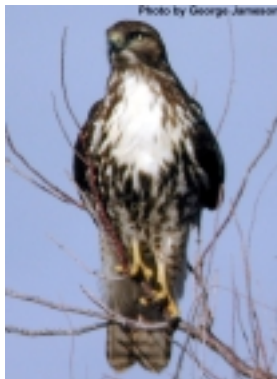
## **WILDLIFE**

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The composition and distribution of wildlife today is greatly different than it was prior to European settlement. The introduction of domesticated animals and cultivated land had a great impact on the native wildlife in the County. Forced to compete with domesticated animals and agriculture cultivation for habitat, native wildlife either adapted or fled.

The changing landscape both eliminated and created habitat. As lakes were formed for flood control, waterfowl and fish habitat flourished. On the other hand, wildlife that relied on prairies dealt with great habitat loss. Large grazing animals, such as buffalo disappeared early on in the European settlement of the county due to both habitat loss and excessive unregulated hunting.

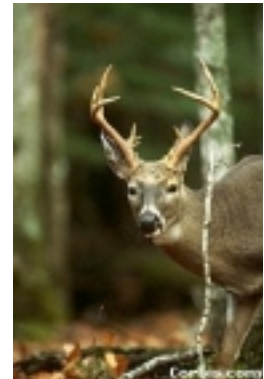
While remnants of native habitat exist today, it is important to recognize their functions. Native prairies provide habitat for Threatened or Endangered Species, help to maintain wildlife diversity, allow populations to breed, and provide access to larger habitats.



Red-Tailed Hawk



Western Meadowlark



White-Tailed Deer

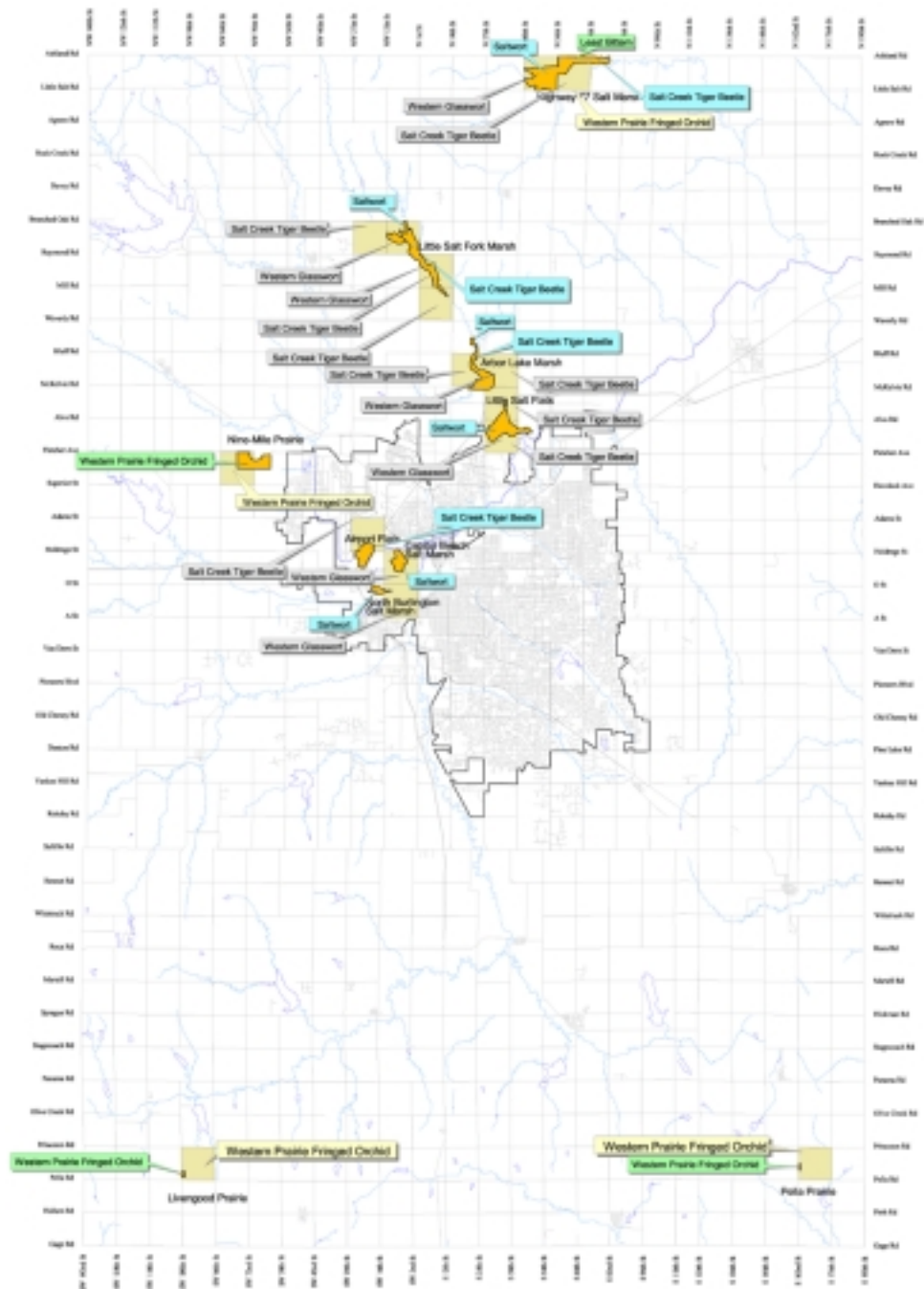
### **Data Sources**

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the 1997 Lancaster County Natural Resources Trend Data and Sustainability Indicator Report and the 1990 Historical and Ecological Resources Survey provided information for this section.

### **County Level Patterns and Perspectives**

Historically, buffalo occupied the plains. Today, the white-tailed deer are the most abundant large grazing mammal (excluding cattle). The changes to the landscape of Lancaster County eliminated some species but many of the smaller species still persist in native remnants or have adapted to a fragmented landscape (See Map 9, Threatened and Endangered Species).

A number of native grassland bird species still inhabit Lancaster County. A small population of prairie chickens persist. Other grassland bird species include the horned lark, and western meadowlark. Migrating waterfowl and various shorebirds are frequent visitors to the County's saline and freshwater wetlands. Raptors such as the red-tailed hawk, American kestrel and bald eagle also reside in the County. In all, of the 301 species of birds found in Lancaster County, about 1/3 nest in native grassland habitats.



## Threatened and Endangered Species



Water development projects have radically altered the character of stream systems in the County, and correspondingly, changes have occurred in fish species as well. Non-native predatory fish now persist in the County's reservoirs. Common fish in the County include minnow, sucker and catfish. Endangered fish found in Nebraska include the pallid sturgeon and sturgeon chub, which are found in the Platte River. While the pallid sturgeon and sturgeon chub are not found in Lancaster County, they can be impacted by activities that take place along Salt Creek.



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### Environmental Imperatives and Planning Implications

Loss of wildlife directly impacts recreation opportunities for area residents. Wildlife viewing, birdwatching, hunting, nature trails and interpretive centers provide areas for citizens interested in utilizing outdoor resources.

Diversity of wildlife is an issue that is becoming important in Lancaster County. As species become extinct or bypass the county, diversity is reduced. Many wildlife species rely on other species as food sources. Loss of food source and habitat leads to wildlife losses as well as narrows the variety of wildlife in the County.



Photo: NEBRASKAland Magazine /  
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission helps preserve wildlife through Wildlife Management Areas. There are eight Wildlife Management Areas in Lancaster County, including Wildwood WMA, Jack Sinn Memorial WMA, Branched Oak WMA, Arbor Lake WMA, Yankee Hill WMA, Killdeer WMA, Hedgefield WMA, and Teal WMA. Additionally, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has several State Recreation Areas (SRA's) that provide areas for wildlife. The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, Lancaster County, and the City of Lincoln also have areas devoted to habitat.

In addition to the government owned land designed to protect wildlife, several non-governmental organizations own and manage land within the County for environmental preservation and conservation. Such groups include The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Nebraska, and the Wachiska Chapter of the Audubon Society. These groups have been and continue to be instrumental in preserving remnant grasslands and saline wetlands.



Photo: NEBRASKAland Magazine /  
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Private individuals own the vast majority of all remnant natural areas that support most of the biological diversity in the County. Without the purchase of fee title or a conservation easement in place on these properties, the prospect of continued species loss is real.

Besides the protection of biodiversity within the County, the conservation and management of native natural areas have direct aesthetic benefits to the citizens of Lancaster County. The preservation of natural areas directly impacts passive recreational opportunities for area residents and is a quality of life issue for many people. Wildlife viewing, nature trails, hunting, and hiking are valuable to many people.

### **Additional Research Needs**

A countywide biological and wildlife management activity survey is necessary to better understand the species within the County. In addition, the effects of invasive species should be studied in order to gain a full understanding of how invasive species impact wildlife.